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COMMENTS ON EARMARKS DURING DEBATE ON RULES OF THE HOUSE

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Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do is to take some time on the floor today to separate fact from fiction with respect to earmarks.

Let me start by saying that I think my record is clear. I

have tried as long as I have been in this Congress to restrain both the dollar amount spent on earmarks and the number of earmarks that we have had. But I want to make certain that if we are looking at earmarks we are asking ourselves the right questions.

I do not want anyone on this floor, or anyone else, including the White House, to suggest that if you eliminate funding for earmarks you save one dime. You do not. The right question to ask about earmarks is simply whether that money is put in the right place or not. And let me explain what I mean.

When the Appropriations Committee, for instance, brings out its appropriation bills, each subcommittee operates under a spending ceiling. And if that bill exceeds that spending ceiling, then a single Member can knock the entire bill off the floor. That means that earmarks, if they are provided, are provided within the predetermined ceiling for that bill. So, for instance, if the committee decides that it is going to earmark 50 after-school projects, those after-school projects are financed within the predetermined ceiling, not above

that ceiling.

So if people want to pose for holy pictures on the issue of earmarks, be my guest. Just make sure you have your facts when you do so. That is all I ask.

A second thing I would point out. If we are going to talk about earmarks, then let us talk about the guy who does the most earmarking. That is the guy in the big White House at the other end of the Pennsylvania Avenue. He is called the President. And I want to give you an example of what happens with the President's budget.

The biggest earmarker in the land is the President of the United States of America. Let me give you one example. Last year, the administration provided 18,808 FIRE grants in districts represented by Republican Members of Congress. It provided 11,470 FIRE grants in districts represented by Democrats. Every single one of those FIRE grants is the functional equivalent of an earmark.

Now, does anybody believe that that ratio of FIRE grants in Republican versus Democratic districts was not political? If you do, I have got a lot of things I would like to sell you after the session is over.

Let me also make one additional point: What is an earmark? If the President sends down an Army Corps of Engineers' list of projects, let's say he suggests 800 projects for the Army Corps of Engineers. Let's say the Congress, after its hearings, determines that 16 of them don't make any sense and so they substitute other projects. Are the 16 which the Congress substituted the only earmarks in that bill? What about the original President's list? He has selected those. Doesn't that represent an earmark on the part of the executive as well?

So I would simply ask, if we are going to start talking earmarks, let's not have the pot calling the kettle black. Let us remember that the Congress has a right to make policy judgments, indeed it has an obligation to

make policy judgments, that direct money to one place or another.

When I was chairman of the Appropriations Committee 12 years ago, the Labor-Health-Education appropriation bill didn't contain a single earmark. Last year, our Republican friends on the other side of the aisle were planning to have 3,000 earmarks in the Labor-Health bill. I think that is a gross exaggeration of what our staffs have the ability to review.

I don't want a single earmark in any bill that the committee staff cannot review to make certain that the reputation of this House and the reputation of the committee is protected. That is why we have the provision in this language that says if any Member asks for an earmark, he also has to certify that that earmark will provide no financial advantage to him or his spouse. To me, that is the way you protect the integrity of the institution and still protect the power of the purse and still protect the prerogative of the Congress. That is the way you protect the prerogatives of the Congress, while also protecting the reputation of

this institution.

So, please, keep your terms straight. Keep your facts straight. Let's not claim things that are not so about some of these changes. Let's recognize what the definitions are and the fact that this is a very complicated matter.